



WHAT IS THE NRCHA?

The history of the National Reined Cow Horse Association extends back hundreds of years. Ancestors of today's reined cow horse came to America with Spanish conquistadors. When Spanish missionaries moved to California in the 1700s, the vaqueros (cowboys) came with them.

For almost 150 years, the California reined cow horses, partners of the vaqueros, reigned supreme. These finely trained horses worked the herds of cattle driven from Mexico and performed the day-to-day chores on the vast cattle ranches. The California vaquero – among the finest horsemen of all time – developed the equipment, the riding styles and the training techniques that produced some of the best stock horses the world had ever seen.

The sudden influx of newcomers into the Golden State during the Gold Rush changed California's complexion and helped bring about the breakup of many of the vast cattle ranches. On the ranches that did remain, modern machinery eventually eliminated much of the need for a well-trained, versatile working horse. By the early 1900s, the reined cow horse was a luxury, not a necessity. This trend continued through World War II; few people had the time to be concerned with the history, the horses and the training programs of "the old days."

Fortunately, all of that changed a few years after the war ended, when a small group of dedicated California horsemen and women decided something ought to be done to preserve the legacy of this magnificent working animal.

The National Reined Cow Horse Association works to preserve the tradition of the Spanish vaquero. The traditional training program included numerous phases, spanning several years before a horse was considered "finished" and capable of performing the standard maneuvers required on ranches, roundups and cattle drives.

The National Reined Cow Horse Association is rooted in tradition, with forward-thinking management by a fifteen member board of officers and directors committed to promoting and preserving the legacy of the reined cow horse.

GUIDE TO THE ACTION

Herd Work

Entry should separate a number of cattle from the herd without unsettling the rest of the group, then gradually allow all but one to return to the herd. Entry is dodging back and forth in front of a single steer, keeping it from returning to the herd of cattle. This is the main action of the herd work, where most of the points will be won or lost.

Horse should seem to be working on its own, on a loose rein. Steer should not be able to get around horse and back to the herd until the entry "quits" that steer and goes to select another (2-3 steers will be worked in the 2 1/2 minute time period).



Rein Work

The horse should work through the pattern with little or no resistance, his movement balanced and rhythmic.

The entry will demonstrate a portion of the work called "run-downs" which include the entry running down the middle of the arena and coming to a sliding stop. The rider's use of the reins to stop horse should be subtle.

The other portion of the rein work, called the "spins" contain 360 degree turns first in one direction and then in the other. The horse should spin smoothly, keeping his head and body relatively low to the ground. One of the hind feet should remain planted: this is known as the "pivot" foot.



Cow Work

Entry is alone with a single steer and is attempting to keep the steer confined at one end of the arena. This is the first phase of the cow work, called "boxing".

The middle phase of the cow work called the "fence runs," includes an entry driving a single steer up and down the long side of the arena next to the fence, heading it off and forcing it to turn when a change of direction is desired. Entry should make at least one clean turn on the fence in each direction.

During the final phase of the cow work, the entry is driving a single steer in circles in the center of arena. This is called "circling up." Entry should work quickly and efficiently to drive the steer in a full circle one way, and then a full circle the other way.



Steer Stopping

Unique to the World's Greatest Horseman competition is the steer stopping, which showcases the horse's ability to complete real ranch work. The horse should break from the box and put the rider in position to rope. Once the cow is caught, the horse should stop straight and smooth, effectively stopping the forward motion of the steer.

